

*Six Variant Readings
in the First Folio of Shakespeare*

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Preface

The following paper represents a slightly abridged but otherwise substantially unaltered version of the Annual Public Lecture on Books and Bibliography given at the University of Kansas on 28 October 1960. Professor Hinman's very comprehensive study of the printing and proofreading of the First Folio of Shakespeare is now at press and will in due course be published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

THE ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURES ON BOOKS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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An Informal Talk by Elmer Adler at the University of Kansas.

Second Lecture 6 October 1954
Peter Murray Hill. *Two Augustan Booksellers: John Dunton and Edmund Curll.*

Third Lecture 9 December 1955
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Fifth Lecture 17 January 1958
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Seventh Lecture 6 November 1959
Allan Stevenson. *Observations on Paper as Evidence.*

Eighth Lecture 28 October 1960
Charlton Hinman. *Six Variant Readings in the First Folio of Shakespeare.*

LET ME BEGIN BY THANKING our Chairman for his very kind words about my connection with the collating machine in the University of Kansas Library. The instrument in question is not quite everything that it is *sometimes* said to be. An account that recently appeared in a Washington newspaper described it as "an electronic machine in which an electric eye reads the lines of type and flashes red lights when it comes upon any variation." But while these words are a good deal more colorful than true, I hope you will allow me to agree that my collator *is* a rather impressive gadget. For one thing it is big. It has no electric eye; but it does embrace a great complex of levers and wheels and motors, of lenses and trick mirrors, of handles and pedals and powerful lights. Not red lights, yet lights that do flash gloriously, if somewhat disconcertingly, when the machine is in actual use. Moreover it has—or at least all the more recently manufactured models have, like the one here—a certain amount of real chrome trim. A collation machine can hardly be said to be a thing of beauty, but it is nevertheless—well, it is nevertheless impressive: big and rather flashy. Flashy, indeed, in more than one way. But what, after all, is it for? What can you *do* with such a machine?

The answer to this question is of course that you can *collate* with it. You can try to discover differences—even very minute differences—between documents that are theoretically identical; between, for example, different copies of the First Folio of Shakespeare.

Now we all know that the first collected edition of the dramatic works of William Shakespeare, published in late 1623, is a book of inestimable value. Because of what it contains, because it is our

only substantive authority for about half of the plays, and for parts of a number of others, the First Folio is precious indeed. What we sometimes forget is that it is also one of the least rare of rare books. Approximately a fifth of the original edition still survives. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington owns some 80 copies; and while no other single owner has more than a very few copies at most, a grand total of well over 200 are known to be extant. And what is certainly true of the Folger 80 is very probably true of them all: that no two of them are textually identical throughout.

It will scarcely come as a shock to anyone here present, I suppose, to be told that different copies of the very same edition of any book printed in the earlier part of the seventeenth century are quite likely to present somewhat different texts. It has long been known, of course, that some copies of the First Folio differ from some other copies. And it has long been known in at least a rough sort of way *why* this is so. Though perhaps I ought at this point to remind you not only of the most essential reasons why different copies differ, but also of the reason why the discovery of the variants requires the collation of a great many copies of the edition being considered—the reason why, in short, we could not hope to know all there is to be found out about the variants in the First Folio until we had some kind of mechanical aid.

Most of the variant readings that appear in different copies of the same book—not necessarily all, but most—are the result of press-correction. They reflect changes deliberately made in the text during printing. The process, in folio printing, may be described as follows.

As soon as the two pages required for any given forme had been set into type, a compositor locked these pages up together in a chase and delivered them as a unit to the press. The pressmen fixed the forme into the bed of their machine and at once began printing, began making impression after impression from the forme in hand. These successive impressions were all piled up on a table alongside the press—all of them, that is, save one or two. An early impression, as a rule no doubt one of the very first, was handed over to a “reader” to serve as proof. The reader went over this sample sheet, marking such errors as he found and as he deemed it necessary to correct. How long it took him to complete this task would of course depend above all upon how carefully he worked; but something

between fifteen and thirty minutes might ordinarily elapse before his marked proof was returned. Presswork, however, was a commodity far too precious to be wasted; and while the reader was engaged with the proof the press continued to print, at the rate of some four impressions a minute, from the still uncorrected forme. Before the reader had spent long over his proof sheet, therefore, a considerable number of uncorrected impressions of the forme in question would have been produced. In due course, however—by the time, let us say, some 60 to 120 uncorrected impressions had been made—the marked proof sheet would be returned. The press would then be stopped, the forme removed to the stone, and its errors corrected. Only corrected impressions would thereafter be made from this forme once the changes called for by the reader had been effected; but the 60 to 120 uncorrected impressions which had meanwhile been worked off would be preserved—they would hardly have been printed in the first place if only to be destroyed—and would eventually find their way, just as if corrected, into different copies of the finished book. Not, however, into any particular copies. Let this point be heavily stressed, for it is of great practical import. The uncorrected states of the various formes that make up the whole book did not go regularly into the same few copies. We might have expected them to. We might have supposed that the workings of the printing house would be sufficiently systematic, if only in the handling of the piles of papers being processed, to insure that individual copies of the finished book would at least ordinarily be made up *either* of early-printed or of late-printed sheets throughout; that any given copy would therefore consist largely either of uncorrected or of corrected states of the text. But unfortunately this proves not to be so. Different copies in fact show an almost infinite variety in their mixtures of early and late; and a copy which is found to represent the uncorrected state of a given forme is almost as likely as any other copy to represent the corrected state of the very next press-variant forme. From which it follows necessarily that the only possible way we can be sure of finding all, or event most, of the variant readings in the book under scrutiny is by collating a very large number of copies of that book. And this is why a collation machine is desirable.

The First Folio is a large book. It contains nearly 900 pages of

small type set in double columns; and to collate a large number of copies, to compare in great detail, word by word and point by point, some 40 or 50 copies through only a single play—this would take, if it had to be done the hard way, something like a year's time. Whereas, given a suitable mechanical aid, the job can be done in a matter of weeks. Not that it can be done in no time at all; and I speak most feelingly on this subject. For even after I had perfected my machine—and there was a great deal of time-consuming trial and error here—I spent more than two solid years collating First Folios with it. But in that period I did manage a detailed comparison of well over 50 copies of the book—of the whole Folio, of every one of the 36 plays.

Despite my initial levities as to the general impressiveness of collation machines, the instrument which made this possible is basically simple. It merely provides means of superimposing the images of the two objects—of the two Folio pages—to be compared, and then of illuminating them alternately. Alternately but continuously, so that there is no interval of darkness between successive images. Thus when the two pages are identical the observer seems to see but one perfectly motionless exemplar of the page. But if they differ in any way, since the observer is in fact seeing first one and then the other, his eye is attracted to the point or points of difference by what appears to be violent motion—as the two readings alternate rapidly before him. Thus in a minute or so he will ordinarily be able to collate a pair of Folio pages—in far less time, alas, than he may then have to spend simply recording the differences he finds.

So much for the collation machine. The big question, the question it was meant to help us answer once and for all, is plain enough: how many and what kinds of differences are there, then, between different copies of the First Folio of Shakespeare? Not only *how many*, be it noted, but *what kinds*; for it is of the first importance that we determine the quality as well as the amount of the proofreading that was done. The correction of a thousand trivial literal errors which, although errors, have no real effect upon either sense or poetic structure—a thousand such corrections may be much less significant than a single change that radically changes meaning. Change “solid flesh” to “sullied flesh” in Hamlet’s

first soliloquy and you may change your hero's whole attitude toward what is rottenest in the state of Denmark. Certainly as regards any such changes, therefore, we shall wish to know on what authority they are based. Can the later reading be supposed to represent what stood in Shakespeare's manuscript, what the poet himself intended? Or does it reflect nothing more than what the proofreader, not bothering to consult any other authority than his own opinion, considered an improvement?

Our big question, then, involves both quantity and quality: how many and what kinds of variants are there in the First Folio? Now I propose, before I have finished, to attempt an answer to both parts of this question. But before doing so I should like to say a few words about what conclusions I might have expected to reach when I began my investigations of the printing house history of the First Folio.

About fifty years ago, led by Pollard and McKerrow and Greg, we learned to distinguish between Good and Bad quarto editions of Shakespeare's plays, and also to determine with some exactness the relationship between the quartos and the Folio; and we gradually came to recognize that those plays for which the Folio preserves our only authoritative text were as a rule printed from manuscripts very close to Shakespeare's own—often, indeed, from Shakespeare's holographs. Thus a certain optimism about what was called the textual problem in Shakespeare began to develop. The early prints were manifestly not so bad as they had once been painted. Most of the quartos were, after all, Good quartos; and those texts first printed in the Folio seemed practically sure to be at least fairly sound—given only a reasonable amount of care over proof-correction. And there was concrete evidence that *some* proofreading, at any rate, had indeed been done. No systematic study of variant readings was possible, but a number of chance discoveries had been made and a dozen or so Folio pages were known to be press-variant. There appeared ample reason to think that the Folio was printed with at least *some* care for textual accuracy. Then, in 1932, appeared E. E. Willoughby's monograph, *The Printing of the First Folio of Shakespeare*, a bibliographical essay which seemed to provide the happiest sort of confirmation to the optimistic view: that

the proofreading for the Folio, while not meticulous, was nonetheless fairly careful, and that the Folio printers in fact took considerable pains to insure that the text they reproduced was substantially correct. Thus Willoughby; and this conclusion was at once accepted as authoritative—and has remained more or less standard doctrine ever since.

But on what evidence does it rest? Mainly on the testimony of a single document. An interesting document, a most instructive one—though hardly a sufficient basis for the generalizations to which it led.

Appearing as the frontispiece to Willoughby's book is a handsome reproduction of a page from the Folio text of *Antony and Cleopatra* in which about twenty errors are marked for correction in what is evidently the hand of an experienced if not a professional proofreader, errors which do not appear in most of the surviving copies of our book. Thus there is no doubt whatever that this page is exactly what it seems to be: part of the proof sheet that was actually used when Folio *Antony* was going through the press. It accordingly provides indisputable evidence that the page in question was subjected to a tolerably thorough process of proof correction. Moreover, says Willoughby—nor for over twenty years was he seriously challenged about this—moreover, we have no reason to doubt that what we see here is representative. Representative. Typical. And if it is, what follows? Willoughby does not develop this point explicitly, but he scarcely needs to; for it will surely be clear that if the *Antony and Cleopatra* page is indeed representative, if something like a score of corrections were made in most of the other pages in the Folio as well, the systematic collation of a large number of copies of the book might turn up some fifteen or eighteen thousand variant readings.

Are there, then, some 18,000 variants in the Folio? Or are there, say, at least half this number? There are not. There are not even a thousand. There appear, in point of fact, to be just over 500. The results of my investigations, in short, are very different indeed from what might have been expected. Nor, I hasten to add, is the chief discrepancy a merely quantitative one—as I hope to show you presently. But first of all let me give a few statistics.

The Folio contains in all about 510 variants that manifestly re-

flect proofreading. Throughout the greater part of the book there is a thin scattering only. There are about 70 variants in the three hundred-odd pages that make up the Comedies, the first of the three major sections of the volume. There are about 70 more in the Histories. In the Tragedies there are some 370; but these are by no means evenly distributed. They are largely confined to six plays. Nearly half of them, moreover, are confined to a mere 70 pages—the pages which prove to have been set into type by an apprentice compositor. The work of this man was much more likely to be proofread than that of any of the other Folio compositors, for it was evidently expected that he would make many mistakes—as indeed he did. But even what he set was not proofed either regularly or with any special care. He made hundreds of errors; he introduced all manner of corruption into the Folio text. When confronted in his copy with such a phrase as “treble woe” what he set was “terrible wooer.” Yet “terrible wooer” and scores of howlers equally striking were left uncorrected by the reader and therefore still stand in the Folio.

But to return to the statistics for just one minute more: only 134 of the nearly 900 pages of the Folio which contain Shakespearian text were proof-corrected; and the average number of changes made even in these 134 was less than four per page. Approximately 750 Folio pages appear not to have been proofed at all.

So much for the *amount* of proofreading that was—and that was not—done. Still more strikingly at variance with the doctrine that considerable pains were taken to insure the accuracy of the Folio text are my findings with respect to the quality of the relatively small amount of proof-correction that *was* effected.

The objective of any proof-correction process is of course to get rid of errors found in the original setting of the text being printed. These errors, however, may be of either of two general kinds—substantive or non-substantive. Substantive errors are those which can be said genuinely to corrupt meaning—as when, for example, a compositor omits or badly garbles a word or words necessary to the sense; or when, for any of a number of possible reasons, he substitutes one reading for another and sets “good” instead of “happy (or “solid flesh” when perhaps he should have set “sallied flesh”). Conversely, non-substantive errors are those which do not

have any real effect upon what is obviously the meaning intended. "Botk" is set for what can only be meant for "Both"; the initial letter of the word "mother" is inadvertently set upside down; or a space is left out and we find "notall" as a single word in place of the separate words "not" and "all"; or two letters are transposed and we get "oen" instead of "one"; and so on. There are, to be sure, a few borderline cases; but as a general rule it will be perfectly clear from the context that an error has been made—and clear, too, exactly what the text should read. Hence we can hardly work up any very lively interest in variants which involve only non-substantive errors. Yet alas, perhaps the most important single lesson to be learned from the variants in the First Folio is that the very great majority of them have nothing to do with anything else. The reader devoted a considerable amount of attention to what I believe are now called "typos"—obvious typographical infelicities which, however, almost never seriously affect meaning. One of his chief concerns was not with words at all, or even with letters, but merely with space-types which, because not properly seated in the forme, were taking ink and so marring what might be called the esthetic effect produced by the finished page. Among the whole of our 510 variants there are only a few dozen which involve real substantive error.

And what of these few dozen? In how many instances here can we suppose the change that was made an authoritative change; that the later or corrected reading more truly represents what Shakespeare wrote—or at any rate what stood in the copy from which the Folio text was printed—than the earlier or uncorrected reading? In short, how many of the variants in the Folio reflect proof-correction by reference to copy?

Of course I cannot present all the evidence here. But I can say that there is abundant evidence—and I shall give several specific examples of it in a moment—that the Folio reader did *not* as a rule consult his copy when correcting such errors as he noticed in his proof sheet. Most of the changes he called for represent only his own purely arbitrary decisions as to how certain quite obvious errors might best—or possibly we should rather say most easily—be put right. How sound his decisions generally were will perhaps be most satisfactorily shown by a glance at those six variant readings to

which my title is meant to refer. Six very small variants, let me say at once. Not one of them is in itself of any great importance. Yet each has its modicum of light to shed on the quality of the press-correction effort that went into the making of our book. And I think you will in the end agree that what might be described as their cumulative candle-power is tolerably illuminating.

Variant 1. The first of my six variants I take from that gruesome tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*. In a few copies of the Folio we find Titus addressing the tongueless Lavinia as a

Speechlesse complayne

This “complayne” is transparently wrong; a vocative, a noun rather than a verb, is what the context demands. But what we find in the corrected Folio text is “complaynet”—which, since there is no such word, scarcely improves matters much. What is really wanted, and what is in fact, the reading we are likely to find in any modern edition of *Titus*, is “complayner.”

Now it is conceivable that “complayner” is indeed what the proofreader called for but that his instructions were imperfectly carried out. For the reader only marked the proof; what changes were then made in the type were ordinarily effected by the compositor responsible for the original error. And it can be demonstrated that the compositor who set the greater part of both *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet* (to mention here but two of the six plays on which he worked) was far from “sharp,” so to speak, and was much given to what may be called incorrect correction. So the fault now in question may well enough be his instead of the proofreader’s. Yet the brute fact remains that the whole process of proof-reading and type correction here left the text at least as corrupt as it was in the original setting. And this is but one of a considerable number of such Folio variants—as we shall soon see. Most of the five others now to be considered, however, have a further distinguishing characteristic; for in these (or at any rate in all but one of them) the later or corrected reading, unlike the “complaynet” in *Titus*, provides an intelligible text. Sense replaces nonsense. For example—

Variant 2. In page 64 of the Histories, a page containing part of *1 Henry IV*, there is a brief colloquy between Prince Hal and the

Hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern. This abused lady, wishing to enter a complaint about the treatment she has received at the hands of Falstaff, begs the prince's attention:

My Lord, I pray you heare me.

Hal is more than a little offhand.

What say'st thou, Mistresse *Quickly*? How dow
thy Husband? I loue him well, hee is an
honest man.

"How *dow* thy Husband?" This (with my italics) is the uncorrected Folio reading. Though it is patently wrong, since "dow" of course means nothing, investigation shows that it represents an error taken over from the copy; for "dow" is also the reading of the quarto of 1613 from which Folio 1 *Henry IV* was set. The Folio compositor, in other words, accurately reproduced what was before him. Yet "How *dow* thy Husband" is nonetheless an unsatisfactory reading, as the Folio proofreader saw. He saw the error and he required correction. In most of the surviving copies of the Folio, accordingly, we find

How does thy Husband?

Which is perhaps a little better. Or is it? The fact of the matter is that our best authority for the text of 1 *Henry IV* is the good first quarto of 1598, where we find

How doth thy Husband?

"How *doth*" and not "How *does*" is almost certainly what Shakespeare wrote.

Now the difference between "does" and "doth" is not very great and, though a principle of some importance is involved here, I shall say nothing more about this rather trifling variant beyond observing that it too is but one of a surprisingly large number of like variants—of which the following are possibly more significant examples.

Variant 3. One of the greatest comic scenes in our literature is the one in 1 *Henry IV* in which Falstaff recounts his heroic achievements at Gadshill. The scene takes place, of course, in the Boar's

Head Tavern in Eastcheap. Falstaff enters storming and calling for drink.

A plague of all Cowards I say, and a
Vengeance too, marry and Amen. Giue
me a cupe of Sacke Boy A plague of
all cowards. Giue me a Cupe of Sacke,
Rogue. Is there no Vertue extant?

And presently—

You Rogue, heere's Lime in this Sacke too:
there is nothing but Roguery to be found
in Villanous man; yet a Coward is worse
then a Cup of Sacke with

With what? The uncorrected Folio, as represented by about a fifth of the Folger copies (and also the Lee facsimile) reads "Sacke with *in't*." The more numerous copies with the corrected reading (and also the Yale facsimile) have "Sack with *lime*." Which, of course, makes sense. But what Shakespeare undoubtedly wrote, as the authoritative quarto shows, was "Sacke with *lime in't*."

What happened seems perfectly clear. The word "lime" was inadvertently omitted from the original Folio setting. But the speech is a prose speech, the text therefore extending clear across the column in each line. To get "lime" in between "with" and "in't" would therefore have involved resetting all the rest of the speech, which is a long one. If the final "e" of "Sacke" were removed, however, then "lime" could be substituted for "in't," the complete nonsense of the uncorrected reading could be obviated, and a quite satisfactory reading could be produced without further difficulty. This substitution was accordingly made. The corrected Folio text is not the true text, and not the text of the copy; but it obviously seemed quite good enough. It put sense in place of nonsense—and this was all that really mattered.

Variant 4 is offered chiefly by way of emphasizing the very same point—though we may find here that we are being faced with a somewhat more positive, and accordingly a more reprehensible, falsification of the true text.

Once again our variant readings are in a speech by Falstaff—his last speech in the play. It comes, you will remember, just after he has proclaimed himself the real conqueror of Hotspur. He hopes to be handsomely rewarded for his exploit—to be made a Nobleman, in fact—and, if so, to reduce and mend his ways. His actual words, according to the good quarto of 1598, are these:

Ile follow, as they say, for Reward If I
do grow great Ile grow less. For Ile
purge, and leaue Sacke, and liue
cleanly, as a Nobleman should do.

This is the text as Shakespeare almost certainly meant it to be. And this, without doubt, is the text that we *should* find in the Folio. But alas the Folio compositor made a little slip. Falling prey here as elsewhere to one of the commonest sins of copyists and typesetters alike, he inadvertently repeated a word. The original Folio setting reads

If I do grow great great, Ile grow less [etc.]

The error—the dittography—is plain, and the proofreader saw it. But what we find in the “corrected” Folio text is

If I do grow great again, Ile grow less

“Grow great *again*”? This, to anyone familiar with fat Jack, will not seem quite right. But to anyone who will examine the variant Folio readings in the Folio itself the reason for the adventitious “again” will be all too plain.

As before we are dealing with prose, with text that regularly extends all the way across the column. The second “great” of the original setting is the last word in the second line of a four line speech. The mere removal of the unwanted word would therefore leave a noticeable hiatus—a kind of hole in the page—unless, to be sure, the remainder of the speech were reset. The easy way out was simply to substitute some other five letter word for the second “great”—a word that would fill the same amount of space without producing any immediately obvious nonsense. And so we find “If I do grow great *again*, Ile grow less.” The later Folio reading represents what was evidently considered an adequate correction.

It got rid of a manifest error, it did so in the most economical way possible; and the correction did no violence to the physical appearance—to the typographical neatness—of the page.

Variant 5. Early in *King Lear* comes the powerful speech in which Kent is doomed to banishment; and early in this speech the old king charges

That thou hast sought to make us breake our vowes,
... and with strain'd pride,

To come betwixt our sentence and our power.

"To come betwixt our *sentence* and our power." This is substantially the reading of the quarto; it is also substantially the reading of the *uncorrected* Folio text; and there is every reason to think it is what Shakespeare wrote. Yet the *corrected* Folio text reads "To come betwixt our *sentences*, and our power." The later reading, in short, corrupts both sense and meter.

The explanation, I think, is that the marks made by the reader on his proof sheet were misinterpreted by the compositor who changed the type. There is a comma after "sentence" in the original Folio setting—a comma which is scarcely wanted. What seems to have happened is that the reader's mark for the deletion of this comma was mistaken by the compositor for an instruction to add an "s" to "sentence." It can be demonstrated that the same compositor was often guilty of much the same kind of mistaking elsewhere, and it is difficult to imagine how else the present miscorrection came to be made. The essential point, however, is that the original setting is in any event a good deal closer to what Shakespeare must be supposed to have written than is the corrected reading. And it may be added that this is equally true of a number of other variants in *King Lear*. My only reason for choosing the "sentence/sentences" variant, indeed, is that it has lately been discussed in print. In a recent article in the *Review of English Studies* we are told not alone that "sentences" is the corrected reading of the Folio but that "the true reading of the line should be 'sentences' in the plural, and that the preference for the quarto singular shown by so many recent editors . . . should be abandoned."

Variant 6. The final item in my present list comes from page 333 in the Tragedies, a page in Folio *Othello*. A most interesting

page, bibliographically, for a number of reasons. In its very first line, for instance, we find one of the most remarkable variants in the entire volume. The reading of the uncorrected state is replaced by a completely different text, and the change can only have been made by reference to copy. In the whole of the Folio there is but one other absolutely certain instance of this. Let me repeat. Among the five hundred-odd variants in the First Folio there are only *two* which involve corrections which must have required reference to copy.

However, it is rather to another of the nine variant readings in this page that I would now invite your attention. The lower part of the second column of page 333 contains what we generally call "The Willow Song." In its uncorrected state the Folio renders the first line of this song thus

The poore Sonle set sining, by a Sicamour tree.

"*Sonle set sining.*" There are three errors here in as many words. A turned letter makes "Sonle" out of what can only be meant for "Soule"; an "e" instead of an "a" produces "set" in place of "sat"; and of course there is something seriously wrong with that next word, "sining."

All three errors were noticed by the Folio proofreader. Noticed and marked for correction—the consequence being what we now find as the first line of the Willow Song in the great majority of the surviving copies of our book:

The poore Soule sat singing, by a Sicamour tree.

"Singing"—even as Desdemona is shown singing her own distress. Thus the correction seems eminently satisfactory. Yet the Willow Song is a pre-Shakespearian piece; its 16th-century text is known and there can be no real doubt that the poor soul should rather be "sighing" than singing her lamentations.

The principle here involved is an important one: obvious error is far less dangerous to the accurate transmission of literary texts than the plausible but unauthoritative changes required by a proofreader whose primary interest is rather in getting rid of manifest typographical blemishes than in insuring the faithful reproduction of the copy. Such a man, beyond all question, the proofreader for

the First Folio was. He ordinarily paid scant attention indeed to substantive errors; only on very rare occasions did he consider it necessary to read his proof against the copy. Not that he never did so. As we have already observed there are two corrections in the Folio that must have been made by reference to copy; and there are some five or six others that may have been. In a considerably larger number of instances, however, the correction process, far from substituting an authoritative good reading for a less satisfactory one, only introduced new error. On balance, therefore, a modern editor would be much better served by a Folio that was *uncorrected* than by one that was corrected throughout.

This is not to say that the Folio text is everywhere egregiously corrupt. But it is to say something else. It is above all to say this: that whatever textual integrity the First Folio may in fact possess depends almost exclusively upon the skill and accuracy of the various compositors (there were five in all) who put the book into type; it owes almost nothing to the activities of the proofreader who occasionally reviewed their work. The optimism of a few years ago was certainly not so well grounded as it seemed. We are a long way still from the fullest possible knowledge of what Shakespeare actually wrote. But at least we now know what one of our intermediate goals must be. The intensive study of the peculiarities of individual Elizabethan compositors—of how well or ill they discharged their appointed tasks, of the kinds of mistakes to which they were especially given (and also the kinds to which they were not)—such studies are not everyman's dish of tea. There is as yet no chrome-trimmed gadget to speed up and ease the work. Yet significant beginnings have already been made. And there is good reason to hope that they will eventually lead to far more satisfactory texts of Shakespeare's plays than any that we have hitherto produced.

CHARLTON HINMAN

Lawrence, Kansas
October 1960